



Community Newsletter, December 2023

Superintendent's Office

Here you will find information from our various teams for the month of December. We are working on making improvements to the monthly check-in and website in the coming year and will be continuing to use the monthly check-in to keep our communities in the loop on all things Voyageurs.

For updates go to: <https://www.nps.gov/voya/learn/management/stateofthepark.htm>

During December the superintendent attended the Minnesota Incident Command System annual meeting in Duluth, and traveled to St. Louis, MO to attend the board meeting of the Jefferson National Parks Association, which is the park's official cooperative association that manages the sales and merchandise in our visitor center gift shops and enables us to sell educational materials about Voyageurs National Park history, culture, and resources.

The superintendent also went on a walk-through of the Crane Lake Visitor Center facility, attended several meetings related to the Kettle Falls electric line project, and hosted the fall Voyageurs Affairs meeting, which is a bi-annual gathering with representatives from various elected officials associated with the park.

Employee Spotlight

Brenda Miles, Fire Budget Analyst, retired on December 31st after 35 years of service with the federal government. She started her career at Voyageurs in a temporary position as a Clerk-Typist in 1980 after graduating from Rainy River Community College. After getting married in 1982 and having three children, she went back to the federal government in 1988 as a Clerk-Typist for U.S. Customs.

Going back to Voyageurs was Brenda's dream, and in the spring of 1989, she was hired on as a seasonal Program Clerk for a maintenance project at Kettle Falls. The following spring, she was hired back into the administration division, and soon after, was hired as the permanent Fire Clerk, where she has been ever since. She started training right away in 1990 to work her way up in fire finance and eventually became a Finance Section Chief on one of the three Minnesota Type 2 fire teams. Her career included many aspects of fire administration, including travel, payroll, budget, incident business/qualifications, and anything else that was needed for not just Voyageurs, but also six other parks and the Midwest Regional Fire Office.

Her many assignments brought her to places like Sequoia Kings Canyon National Park, Pipestone National Monument, the Apostle Island Ice Caves, and several stints at Buffalo National River and Ozarks National Scenic Riverways. Among her most memorable experiences were flying over glaciers in a helicopter to drop the incident commander in a meadow at Glacier National Park and working with many local Alaskan folks during a fire assignment at Wrangell-St. Elias National Park in McCarthy Alaska, where she made many treasured friendships and again got to fly over glaciers with an Air Attack Pilot. She also assisted on many non-fire events over the years, including the historic visit of Pope Francis to Philadelphia and the 75th Sturgis Motorcycle Rally in 2015.

Brenda says that she has had a wonderful career. She worked with many fine people, made many great friends, traveled to breathtaking places, and worked on many memorable events. Really, what more can a person ask for in a job! She has mixed feelings about leaving her second home after all these years, and will be missed greatly by her coworkers, but is ready for the next chapter in her life. Congratulations, Brenda!



Administration and Business Services Team

Administrative staff are working closely with all divisions to create budgets and program labor and other expenditures for the upcoming summer season.

Two newly hired administrative staff members, shared with Apostle Islands National Lakeshore, started their appointments in mid-December. Welcome, Joelyn and Juniper! We look forward to welcoming a new Administrative Assistant, Katherine Loera, to the team stationed at Voyageurs National Park sometime next month.

Natural and Cultural Resources Team

Voyageurs National Park's Tribal Liaison facilitated an engaging discussion with staff from the park and the Voyageurs Conservancy regarding ways to engage Tribes in conversations regarding Tribal co-stewardship efforts. This collaboration aims to implement several listening workshops with the Bois Fort community in the coming months that will help determine potential ways that we can work together in supporting our shared interests in the conservation and preservation of the park's natural and cultural resources.

After detecting no additional zebra mussels in Voyageurs National Park in 2023, staff are working on a monitoring report to document their efforts and findings. Resources staff also attended a multi-park call regarding invasive mussels.

The park’s aquatic biologist attended the Rainy River - Rainy Lake Watershed planning meeting, an update meeting in which USGS researchers provided updates on their progress using eDNA to detect aquatic invasive species, and a meeting regarding an International Joint Commission (IJC) funded study of Walleye and Lake Whitefish in both the Rainy Lake and Namakan reservoirs.

The Natural and Cultural Resources Team won the park’s Employee Fall Photo Contest with this fun photo of “Voyageurs’ All-Star Beaver Crew”, submitted by park biologist Steve Windels, while conducting ongoing research to monitor and learn about the role beavers play in the park’s wetland ecosystem.



Interpretation, Education, and Recreational Permits Team

Interpretation rangers are busy planning for winter visitor center operations. In addition to the Rainy Lake Visitor Center being open Friday through Sunday, park staff will also maintain operating hours at the the Kabetogama Lake Visitor Centers on Fridays and Saturdays. This winter schedule runs from January through March, with open hours from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

New winter season dates have been set in recreation.gov to allow for the rental of snowshoes and cross country skis from the Rainy Lake Visitor Center during normal operating hours. Rentals in youth to adult sizes can be reserved online, in advance, at [Voyageurs National Park Winter Equipment Rentals](#). Once winter arrives, come rent some equipment, explore, and warm up with some hot cocoa upon your return!

The interpretation division worked closely with their official charitable partner, the Voyageurs Conservancy, on their annual work plan and to collaborate on programming for this winter and next summer. The conservancy has been hard at work fundraising, with hopes of garnering \$50,000 by the end of the month, and is focused on planning for several projects, including the Mobile Classroom, Boreal Stargazing Week, engagement meetings with the Boise Fort community, Crane Lake Visitor Center, and their annual Spring Thaw fundraiser event that occurs every April. This month, the Conservancy joined the MN Department of Natural Resources to present the science behind the Aurora Borealis, and how Voyageurs National Park is the perfect place for the chance to see them, as a part of their Outdoor Skills & Stewardship weekly webinar series.

As winter finally makes an appearance, the next summer season is already on the horizon, with promising numbers for camping and houseboat permits, and interviews to hire next season’s team of interpretive rangers, tour boat captains, and volunteers well underway.

Reservations made as of Dec 30 for the following seasons:						
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Camping Reservations	587	757	1325	1507	1417	1561
Camping Visitors	3195	4505	8029	8903	8392	9090
Houseboat Reservations	permits opened late	29	43	96	54	61
Houseboat Visitors	permits opened late	169	277	642	344	346

Visitor and Resource Protection Team

While we wait for safe ice to form, visitation has been low, offering staff time to check over their ice rescue equipment and to start planning their shared community skiing event hosted at Voyageurs with the local ski club, the Polar Polers.

All rangers continued to assist with instructing students at Vermilion Community College’s law enforcement academy in Ely, MN. This annual collaboration helps meet the specialized training needs of resource protection officers.

The team is processing applications and annual reports for Commercial Use Authorizations (CUA) and working on updates and improvements to the CUA and Special Use Permit (SUP) website information. A vacancy for a new Commercial Services Specialist position to assist with related duties was posted this month.

Facilities Team

The Kabetogama Lake Visitor Center boat launch replacement project continues to move forward, with the coffer dam being removed in mid-December and the Namakan maintenance crew building cribs for a new boat ramp dock.

Crews checked ice periodically throughout the month at this and other boat ramp areas, hoping for adequate conditions to venture further onto the ice, but warm weather and rain halted operations.

The Rainy maintenance crew has been busy improving the quarters 44 cabin at the Whispering Pines seasonal park housing area at Ash River, which accommodates many of our interpretation rangers and biological science technicians.

Much planning is going into the improvement of internet connectivity throughout the park, to hopefully include new fiber connections at Kabetogama Lake Visitor Center and headquarters, and starlink satellite at the Rainy Lake Visitor Center.

Interviews were conducted for two maintenance positions in the Namakan district of the park. Adam Miles was selected to move into a WG-7 maintenance worker position, and Beau Squires will transition from his seasonal position in the park for the past several seasons to a WG-5 permanent maintenance worker. Congratulations, Adam and Beau!

The Historic Preservation Training Center (HPTC) hired a new crew member to be stationed out of Voyageurs. Paul Turowicz worked at Voyageurs during two stints with the SCA (Student Conservation Association) in which he helped establish the Mukooda hiking trail and worked on the Ek Lake trailhead. Congratulations and welcome!

Vacancy announcements for next summer season’s maintenance workers were posted this month and are still open. These are great opportunities to be directly involved with the many projects that happen each year to improve park facilities and enhance the overall visitor experience here at Voyageurs.